

PARTNER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of the Partners Communication Group, held at 3.30pm on Thursday 18 April 2024 by Microsoft Teams.

SQA

John Booth (JB)
[redacted name]
Donna Stewart
[redacted name]
[redacted name]
Richard Pidgeon
[redacted name]
Margot McKerrell
[redacted name]

Partners

Laura Burnett, SDS
Sara Lightbody, Scottish Government
Stewart Nicolson, ADES
Lorraine Davidson, SCIS
Mike Corbett, NASUWT
James Cowans, SSTA
Gavin Yates, Connect Scotland
Jeremiah Chibueze, SRUC
Andy Harvey, EIS
Emma Diamond, SDS
Ms Armour, SQA Coordinator

1. Welcome

John Booth (JB), Director of Communications, welcomed the group and introduced Gavin Yates of Connect Scotland as a new member. With the exam diet beginning on 22 April and only 110 days until results day, JB told the group that a presentation would be given showing the communications plan covering this critical period.

2. Communications Plan

Richard Pidgeon (RP), Head of Communications and Engagement, presented a slide show detailing SQA's communications plan from now to Results day and beyond. RP hoped that the members would help in sharing these communications to ensure all are reached.

RP explained that communication objectives from now to Results Day included keeping all audiences informed, signposting them to information and support, reminding audiences of the approach taken to National Qualifications (NQ) and the reasons why, reassuring audiences that fairness, standards and credibility of learners' qualifications have been maintained and celebrating learners' achievements.

A timeline of the learner campaign was shown. Phase 1 began in February/March with the launch and distribution of "Your Exams" material and posters which have been signposted through social media, radio campaigns and physical advertising such as appearing on bus shelters. Phase 2 during the exam diet in April and May sees continued promotion of MySQA. Phase 3 begins in June and runs through to August with Results Day preparation and continued promotion of MySQA.

RP introduced [redacted name] to the group as External Affairs Manager (social media). [redacted name] discussed with the group the use of social media to promote learner hub resources such as Your Exams, the MyStudy and MyExams apps and wellbeing resources.

During the exam diet, good luck messages will appear on social media as well as continued promotion of MySQA, FAQs, wellbeing resources, blogs, videos and a Your Results warm up promo. On Results Day itself, social media will be used to promote resource signposting, infographics and congratulations messages.

RP told the group that information relating to appeals both for learners and centres would be available from the end of May. From mid-June, the Your Results guide will be available. RP then told the group about the planned approach to communications for Results Day which looked to build on the approach taken in 2023. Collaboration was noted as key, as was a focus on learners' achievements across the "wide breadth of qualifications" and not just those courses with exams. As a warm up to Results Day a number of briefings around the grade boundary process would be given to stakeholders and media. Learner centred resources on what grade boundaries mean for them would be issued and blog posts would appear from SQA and partners relating to a range of exams information. On Results Day (6 August) a media briefing highlighting trends and key messages from the Chief Examining Officer's Report would be given alongside a number of publications, congratulatory videos, Learner Q&As, information about the Candidate Advice Line and recognition of care experienced learners.

3. Discussion

RP asked the group for feedback on the proposed communications plan and whether they would agree that communications were moving in the right direction. RP also asked the group to consider how their organisation could support the communications plan and how SQA could best work with them to serve learners.

A member of the group commented that it would be interesting to determine the percentage of learners that follow social media. Any communications research showing communications preferences would be helpful to share with other organisations and may help them make decisions relating to their own communications plans. The group agreed that it was important to cover all bases. The group were told that SCIS had recently highlighted success at schools where learners with complex needs had gained qualifications and offered to provide a case study which could be used for a human interest story.

A member of the group commented that the SQA approach to communications seems to work. The major concern from teachers is the re-introduction of course work/assignments and in particular relating to the sciences. He noted that SQA should be prepared for scrutiny in that area and should consider how to address those issues. SQA colleagues confirmed that they were alive to the concerns.

Another member of the group commented that the approaches previously landed well and should be well received. The member commented that the media often show the approach to appeals as unfair. Care should be taken to communicate the processes of appeals and what will/will not be considered. Otherwise, a level of criticism could be made.

One of the members of the group asked if there were any difficulties identified in the process of learners completing full assignments. They also questioned whether there would be sufficient numbers of markers and if any delays were anticipated. The member suggested that if this is to be an issue, communications could be issued early to avoid criticism later. The member also commented that if it is placed on record that the approach to marking will be sympathetic then this could alleviate concerns.

Members from SQA commented that in relation to appointee recruitment, as is usual, some subjects have more difficulties with recruitment than others, however this issue is being addressed.

JB thanked the group for their valuable input. RP commented that links for social media would be shared with the group and encouraged members to share widely.

4. Next Meeting

June 2024 to discuss Results Day communications plan.